DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT:
APPARENT AND HIDDEN COSTS IN MAINE

Remarks by G. Steven Rowe
Maine Attorney General

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Conference on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in Maine:
The Cost to Our Families, Communities and Economy

Good Morning. I am pleased to welcome all of you here today. I am especially pleased to welcome our newly-elected legislators. Thank you for giving your time to the important matter of domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine. And thanks to you veteran legislators who have worked on these issues for years.

I also appreciate the willingness of law enforcement personnel, members of the judiciary, victims' advocates, corrections officials, prosecutors, attorneys, mental health professionals, and all others who have taken time from your busy schedules to be here today.

As I look at you this morning, I recognize many long-time crusaders in the fight against domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine. We are honored by your presence.

This conference would not be occurring without the support of several groups. I want to express my gratitude to the Maine Justice Assistance Council, Community Policing Institute, Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and the Maine Prosecutors' Association for their efforts to fight violence against women.

The name of this conference is "Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in Maine: The Cost to Our Families, Communities and Economy."

When I use the term domestic violence this morning, I am speaking of a pattern of coercive behavior involving threats or actual acts of violence between partners, and in the vast majority of those cases, the perpetrators are male and the victims are female.

This morning I want to talk to you about both the apparent and hidden costs of domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine. The apparent costs are in the pain and suffering of individuals set forth in cold, hard crime statistics and stories of abuse.

Among the hidden costs is the price that children pay when they witness domestic violence in their homes.

Hidden costs also include the price workers pay when their employers and co-workers fail to recognize that they are living with violence.

I will speak more about these and other hidden costs in a few minutes.

But first, let's remind ourselves of the facts of domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine and the nation.

Domestic violence predominantly involves males abusing females; it occurs between cohabitants or spouses who have been a couple for five years or less; it happens where the victims live; it involves physical violence, and it is part of a pattern of abuse.

And lest anyone think otherwise, domestic violence occurs everyday in every part of this State. In the year 2000, more than 15,000 people received services from the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence. Sadly, we know that thousands more suffered without the benefits of such services.

Statistics about sexual assault paint another grim picture. Nationally, approximately 22% of victims are raped by intimates such as husbands or boyfriends.

Forty-seven percent are raped by acquaintances, and 2% by other relatives. In 2001, Maine's sexual assault crisis and support centers served over 3,700 victims of sexual assault.

Teen dating violence is another sad part of the picture of violence against young women in this State. Forty percent of girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.

I want to emphasize that domestic violence is a crime. Listing the crimes is sobering.

For example, during the first six months of last year, in Kennebec and Somerset Counties: 138 defendants were charged with simple assault, aggravated assault, or felony assault; 44 defendants were charged with violating a protective order or bail conditions; and 19 defendants were charged with other offenses, including terrorizing, criminal threatening, criminal mischief, criminal trespass, obstructing a report of crime or injury, harassment, violation of privacy, and tampering with a victim.

The wounds of a sexual assault are deep and long-lasting. After a physical violation, victims often experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, shame, humiliation, and self-blame.

A national study found that 18% of American women were victims of rape or attempted rape at some point in their lives. And the victims of sexual assault are usually our young people. Another national study of violence against women reported that 83% of women victims were under the age of 25 at the time of the rape

The shame in this is not the victims'. It is the perpetrators' shame. And it is our shame as well if we are not doing all we can to protect women from this violence.

The aim and effect of the perpetrators' actions is to generate a feeling of terror in their victims.

I know that many of you are familiar with the cycle of power and control found in relationships involving domestic abuse. In order to maintain power and control, a perpetrator will engage in a wide range of terror tactics, including emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying, and blaming. He threatens a mother's relationship with her children or threatens harm to the children themselves. He resorts to intimidation, coercion, threats, and ultimately to physical violence.

A story from the Kennebec-Somerset DA's Office about one domestic abuser illustrates such terror tactics. This perpetrator had already come to police attention, but had moved out of state.

He then began using e-mail to threaten his victim with murder, sending her pictures of the military-style assault rifles he intended to use. Some of these weapons were equipped to launch grenades, which he claimed he would fire into her workplace.

The victim contacted law enforcement, and the perpetrator was arrested on his return to Maine. He was in possession of the weapons he had threatened to use. This awful tale highlights the lengths to which an abuser will go to terrorize his victim, the misuse of the tools of our electronic age to perpetrate abuse, and that domestic violence can visit the workplace.

Stories of domestic violence are difficult for victims to tell and others to hear. Tales of rape are extremely difficult for women to reveal, and for society to confront. We are indebted to the best-selling author Alice Sebold for her courage in conveying the horrible story of her rape in her memoir Lucky.

She chose the title because she was told she was "lucky" -- a young woman had previously been murdered at the place where Alice was raped. She was "lucky" because she had only been raped and not murdered!

At 18, as a college freshman, Alice was brutally assaulted on her way home one night. The attacker beat her with fists, raped her, and urinated in her face. Several months later, Alice saw the rapist in the street. He greeted her with a smile and said "Don't I know you from somewhere?" Alice testified against this man at his criminal trial. The police called her the best rape witness ever. After conviction, her assailant received the maximum prison sentence.

Alice Sebold's bravery in telling her story in court and to readers helps give voice to the many victims of sexual assault. Tragically, for many women it is too difficult to talk publicly about these crimes.

In Maine in 2000, 893 sexual assaults occurring in that year were reported to the crisis hotline of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Yet the Maine State Police crime statistics for 2000 show only 318 rapes being reported to police.

Our latest compilation of statistics about domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine reflects that the numbers are going in the wrong direction. Domestic assault, which dropped in 2000, grew by over 10% in 2001, and sexual assault increased by over 2% in that same year. We can only hope that the elevated numbers are due to an increase in reporting, rather than an increase in the incidence of these crimes.

One terrible statistic that persists in Maine is that one out of every two murders over the last decade in our state has been a domestic violence-related homicide. The facts of some of these cases give substance to the statistics.

An 18-year-old is stabbed to death by her 23-year-old husband, who shoots and kills himself. A man shoots and kills another who had been dating the murderer's ex-girlfriend. A husband shoots to death his wife, her sister, and himself. A former boyfriend breaks into his ex-girlfriend's home and shoots and kills her and himself.

That is a depressing, and only partial, list of Maine's domestic violence-related homicides over the last two years. For me, one of the most disturbing facts is that in each of the six domestic homicide cases reviewed in 2001 by Maine's Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel, family, friends, or co-workers had some awareness of prior abuse by the perpetrator.

This conference is about all of us who are aware of violence against women in Maine doing our part to stop this outrage —whether we are family, friends, co-workers, public servants, or policymakers.

I have described for you the <u>apparent costs</u> of domestic and sexual assault in a litany of disturbing statistics and case facts.

Now, I want to turn to some of the <u>hidden costs</u> of domestic violence and sexual assault. The cost to children's lives is of particular concern to me.

Statistics reveal that child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present. Children who are the targeted victims of physical or sexual violence suffer in many ways, and that is an important and related topic for another day. But even children who witness violence in their home pay a higher price than many of us realize.

The Child Witness to Violence Project at Boston Medical Center works to help children who have been exposed to violence in their homes and communities. The Project also aims to explain the effects on children of seeing violence. A story from <u>Children Who See Too Much</u>—a book by Betsy McAllister Groves, the Project's director—tells of the heartbreaking impact of domestic violence on kids.

Ms. Groves writes of a seven-year-old boy who witnessed his father assaulting his mother in their home. The boy called the police. To demonstrate that domestic violence can occur in any setting, Ms. Groves notes that the father was a successful lawyer and the family lived in an upscale Boston suburb.

A counselor at the Child Witness to Violence Project was asked by the court to assess the boy as the father sought visitation upon the parents' separation.

After establishing a trusting relationship with the child, the counselor asked him what he missed about his dad. The boy said playing baseball with him.

The counselor then asked the boy what it would be important to think about if he was to visit with his father. After some thought, the boy replied "'Well, I think maybe we could have visits, but not for a long time.'" How long a time, the counselor asked. The boy replied, "'When I'm old enough to get away if I have to.'"

Children who witness violence at home feel there is no safe place. When a child's parent is the victim of violence, that parent often becomes emotionally unavailable to the child. This is one of the true tragedies of domestic violence.

All children need to be able to turn to a parent for security and protection. But the sad truth is, the parent who is the victim of domestic violence is often unable to provide that emotional protection. The result is that the child often engages in withdrawal, avoidance and ceases to view parents as protectors.

We know that witnessing violence is damaging to a child's emotional development. We also know that children's understanding of events is shaped by their cognitive development. Without careful adult explanations of events, children create their own meanings for events. These meanings create an operating script for how the world works.

Recent research in cognitive development indicates that living in a home with domestic violence may have physiological as well as emotional effects on a child.

Frequent exposure to violence can actually change the structure of the developing brain, particularly among children younger than three. Neurochemical changes can increase impulsive and violent behavior. And chronic exposure to brutality, cruelty and abuse can lead to chronic overactivation of the human stress response and a permanent state of hyperarousal in the child. This may, in turn, increase aggressive and impulsive behavior. In the words of Bruce Perry, a researcher at Baylor University, "the terrorized infant become the terrorizing adolescent."

This explains why children who grow up in homes with domestic violence are often distracted and unfocused. Why they are often overaroused and hyperactive. And why they may have problems in school or seem to be constantly disruptive.

Just listen to this. Studies between delinquent and nondelinquent youth have found that a history of family violence is the most significant difference between the two groups. And nationally, 80% of violent juvenile and adult prisoners experienced domestic violence as children.

Thus, it was no surprise when I learned last year that out of fifteen girls interviewed at the Long Creek Correctional Facility in South Portland, every one of them admitted that they had grown up in homes with domestic violence.
Here are some other facts supported by statistics.

A child's exposure to the father abusing the mother is the strongest risk factor for transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next.

Men who have witnessed their parents' domestic violence are three times more likely to abuse their own wives than children of non violent parents.

The price children who witness violence pay is a cost to all of us.

Kids diverted in their development by violence have trouble paying attention and learning in school. They develop behavioral problems. When they see violence, children, whose job it is to learn much by imitating adults, learn absolutely the wrong way to negotiate relationships. And so, the community pays the costs for remedial education.

The community also bears the costs of bad behavior in school and on the streets, pays for mental health services, builds correctional facilities, and tries to help rebuild the families children need. On that last point, let me note that Maine's Bureau of Child and Family Services estimates that one-half of substantiated child protection cases involve serious domestic violence. Let me say that again. One-half of substantiated child protection cases involve serious domestic violence.

Educational problems, mental health needs, and prisons may never disappear entirely from the human experience. But how much might we save of the hearts and minds of children, never mind our pocketbooks, if kids simply never saw violence perpetrated against someone they love in their home? Home is supposed to be where the heart is – not where the hurt is.

Violence or the threat of violence against children is one of the methods some perpetrators use to intimidate and control their adult victims. The Kennebec-Somerset DA's Office provides us with another case story to illustrate this point.

A Victim Witness Advocate received information that a domestic violence defendant out on bail was again living with his victim. An investigator interviewed the victim and learned that this was true. But the investigator learned that this was also true: the defendant had put a gun to the head of the victim's two-year-old son, threatening to kill him. Fear for her child's safety, as well as her own, was added to the victim's burden.

Women bear many burdens from domestic abuse or sexual assault they suffer. Fifty-nine percent of women who are AMHI Consent Decree class members report having been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

As I mentioned earlier, another hidden cost occurs in the workplace. When a woman arrives at work with painful physical, emotional or psychological injuries brought from home, can we really expect her to be at her optimal productivity? Productivity falls off when she receives harassing phone calls, or fears walking to her car because her domestic abuser has targeted her at work. Anxiety, sleep deprivation, inability to concentrate, and abdominal pain are constant companions of many women in the workplace.

Maine Employers Against Domestic Violence is alerting employers to the reality of domestic violence in the workplace. Excellent trainings about domestic violence and the workplace are available. Supervisors in my Office received an introductory training recently. We are now finalizing a domestic violence policy for the Attorney General's Office.

That policy will be comprehensive and will require ongoing mandatory training for managers. We plan to put it on our website as soon as it is ready – hopefully within a couple of weeks.

At this afternoon's final workshop, you will hear much more about the costs of domestic violence to women employees and their employers.

At that workshop, you will also hear about the social and economic costs associated with domestic violence and sexual assault.

We all know the costs in human terms – the physical, emotional and psychological devastation to human beings; the loss of feeling safe; the loss of self-esteem; the loss of dignity; and for many victims of domestic violence –sadly the loss of hope.

I know that everyone here today has a caring heart and wants to do all you can to prevent those losses.

However, even if you didn't have a heart to care about these human losses, you should care about the effects of domestic violence and sexual assault because it hits your pocketbook and it hits it hard.

You should care about the impact that domestic violence and sexual assault have on our state budget and on the taxes you pay.

The economic costs of domestic violence and sexual assault include both direct and indirect costs.

Direct economic costs include health care (which includes emergency room care, hospitalization, mental health care, alcohol and drug abuse treatment). Direct costs also include child well-being costs (such as child protective services, foster care, counseling, special education). Direct costs include emergency shelters and transitional housing. They include all kinds of criminal justice system costs and other social services costs as well.

Indirect economic costs include the value of goods and services lost as a result of the effects of domestic violence and sexual assault. These include, for example, job losses, lost productivity, disruptions in the work place, and poor work habits.

These economic costs were gathered and analyzed by a group of respected researchers in a study underwritten by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services.

The study concluded that domestic violence against adults costs our nation more than $67 billion each year. It also concluded that, of the total costs to violence against children, 40%, or another $66 billion, is attributable to domestic violence. Finally, the study concluded that sexual assault costs our nation $127 billion per year.

When we add these figures, we see that the aggregate annual cost to our nation of domestic violence and sexual assault is $260 billion.

Let's bring that home to Maine. Apportioning these costs on a per capita basis yields a total of $1.2 billion for our State.

$1.2 billion! That's $1,000 a year in costs for every man, women and child in this state.

You may be thinking that sounds high. You may think that the total includes cost duplications. Let's say it is high. In fact, let's reduce it by half. Let's say the annual costs of domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine is not $1.2 billion, but is only $600 million.

$600 million. Our current annual general fund State budget is about $2.6 billion. $600 million is about 23% of our State's current general fund annual budget.

Let me say that again, even if take a very conservative estimate of the economic costs of domestic violence and sexual assault to our State, the costs are still almost a quarter of our State's general fund budget. That makes sense when we consider the costs of special education, mental heath services, child protection services, judicial and corrections costs, and all the other costs attributable to domestic violence and sexual assault.

My friends, it's time we looked at the remedial costs that our government is incurring to deal with the devastating effects of domestic violence and sexual assault.

It's time that we start connecting the dots back to the root causes.

By targeting more of our public resources on prevention and early intervention and treatment, we will not only save the taxpayers' money, but we will also save in terms of something far more important-- human potential.

Today, we see women who miss work because of violence at home. Or, if they do make it to work, they are unable to concentrate because of the emotional scars. We see the effects of violence at home and in school externalized by children acting out in aggressive ways. We see the effects of violence internalized by children withdrawing socially, feeling depressed or feeling self-blame. It is time we connected the dots.

If we want to build a world-class workforce in Maine, we must ensure that women do not have to stay home from work because of the wounds of violence that they suffer at home. And we must ensure that, when women do come to work, their minds are free and not preoccupied with violence at home. Its' time we connect the dots.

If we want to build a world-class workforce in Maine, we need more of our students graduating from college. That will happen if more students graduate from high school with high academic ability and aspirations. Academic ability and aspirations are built over time. It all starts with that 5 year-old entering kindergarten. If she is emotionally, psychologically and physically healthy and ready to learn, her chances of doing well are significantly increased. It's time we connect the dots.

Yes, it is time that we connect the dots to truly see the human devastation caused by domestic violence and sexual assault in our society. It is time that we connect the dots backwards to the causes of domestic violence and sexual assault.

In closing, let me acknowledge that we have come a long way in the fight against domestic violence and sexual assault in the past thirty years or so. Many of you in this room have been responsible for bringing this devastation out from the shadows and into the sunlight.

You have worked to build a network of shelters for battered women and their children. You have worked to have domestic violence and sexual assault defined as serious crimes. And you worked with law enforcement to ensure that those new laws are diligently enforced.

You worked first to help the community change its attitude, and then its law.

Yet, we know that there is more to do. Lawmakers must make sure our statutes remain tough on perpetrators. They must make sure we provide public funding for critical prevention measures like our newborn home visitation program. They must make sure we adequately fund agencies that provide resources to victims who seek safety and assistance in breaking free of domestic violence.

Police must make arrests and let offenders know that their future behavior will be watched. Prosecutors must take perpetrators to court with the help of victims' advocates' support for complainants. Employers must adopt workplace policies supporting victims of domestic violence and deterring perpetrators.

All Maine citizens, in all settings, must let their family members, friends, and co-workers know that violence against women is unacceptable in the State of Maine.

By being here today you are sending the message that domestic violence and sexual assault will not be tolerated. Today's workshops will, I hope, help equip you to carry that message back to your organizations and communities.

Thank you for doing your part—now and in the future—to combat domestic violence and sexual assault in Maine.